



State of Arizona

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Governor Jan Brewer Activates New Food Stamp Fraud Prevention Unit

PHOENIX – Governor Jan Brewer and the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) set in motion a new anti-fraud unit effective July 1. The new DES Trafficking Detection Unit (TDU) will ensure that people obtaining food stamps are not using these benefits illegally.

“We have an obligation to taxpayers,” said Governor Brewer. “These benefits can only be used by people who are eligible and need help. The State of Arizona will not tolerate any abuse of government benefits. The Nutrition Assistance Program is a necessary part of the safety net, particularly in these difficult times, but these benefits must be used to purchase food. Anything else is illegal.”

DES denied payments of approximately \$9.4 million in Nutrition and Cash Assistance benefits to ineligible clients as a result of investigations conducted by the DES Office of Special Investigations in 2008 and 2009. The TDU, which becomes operational today, will ensure that recipients of nutrition assistance are not trying to convert these benefits into cash, in violation of state and federal law.

The unit will include at least two investigators who meet the standards for Sworn Peace Officers, established by the Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training Board. The unit will focus on recipient fraud associated with retailer trafficking by:

- Investigating the use of the electronic benefit transaction cards issued to persons who qualify for Nutrition Assistance
- Working with state, federal and local law enforcement organizations to investigate evidence that clients are trying to use the benefit cards illegally
- Conducting fraud investigations that may include undercover operations
- Assisting with the prosecution of persons committing benefit fraud

The DES unit will be working with Arizona retailers who support the Nutrition Assistance program. “We welcome this effort and will cooperate fully to ensure that all recipients of public benefits are using them properly,” said Tim McCabe, President of the Arizona Food Marketers Alliance. “Our members work diligently to comply with the law and we support any effort that reassures the public that everyone is playing by the rules.”

Anyone who believes they have evidence that benefits are being used fraudulently should report the abuse by contacting the DES Fraud hotline at **1-800-251-2436**, or by filing an online **Fraud Report**.

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